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TAGS: PREL MOPS KWBG KPAL IS
SUBJECT: IDF NABLUS RAID KILLS THREE, INFURIATES
PALESTINIAN OFFICIALS AND PUBLIC

REF: JERUSALEM 1028

Classified By: Consul General Daniel Rubinstein
for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) Summary: Following the fatal shooting of an Israeli settler on December 24, Israeli security forces conducted a large-scale raid into Nablus city center in the early hours of December 26 which resulted in the death of three Palestinian suspects. In the wake of the raid, Palestinian Authority (PA) officials argued angrily that the IDF action represented an unnecessary and dangerous escalation, and that the interdiction of the three suspects should have been assigned to the PA -- which, they assert, had cooperated fully with the GOI in its investigation up to that point. Israeli military rules-of-engagement were also criticized by Israeli and Palestinian human rights groups, who pointed to the circumstances surrounding the death of all three targets as evidence of an overly aggressive approach. At the funeral of the three suspects, held December 26, Palestinian public anger ran high. Anti-PA, anti-Abbas, and anti-Fayyad slogans were shouted by a crowd estimated at 15,000, demanding an end to PA-GOI security coordination. End Summary.

DECEMBER 24 MURDER OF SETTLER IN NABLUS AREA

¶12. (C) On the evening of December 24, Rabbi Meir Avshalom Hai, a resident of Shavei Shomron settlement, was shot and killed near the West Bank village of Ramin, in the Nablus-Tulkarem area, between the settlements of Shavei Shomron and Einav. Note: The last Israeli fatality as a result of Palestinian-settler violence took place eight months previously, in April 2009. End Note. In the wake of the incident, both Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Palestinian security services took steps to apprehend those responsible. PA National Security Forces (NSF) West Bank Commander Abu al-Fatah told Post that on the night of the incident and the following day, IDF established roadblocks in the Nablus-Tulkarem area and conducted sweeps of several Palestinian villages in the vicinity. Palestinian Civil Police (PCP) Chief Hazim Atullah said that immediately following the shooting, PA security forces embarked upon an "intensive arrest campaign," in which approximately 150 potential suspects were detained in Palestinian custody for questioning.

INITIAL PA-GOI COORDINATION ON INVESTIGATION

¶13. (C) PA officials tell Post that Shin Bet and the IDF coordinated closely with PA security forces in the early hours of the investigation. Atullah described the exchange of intelligence between the GOI and the PA on the night of

December 24 and the day of December 25 as "smooth and tight," and noted that Shin Bet and IDF officials praised the reaction of PA security forces in private meetings. On the morning of December 25, according to Atullah, Israeli security officials passed the PA the name of an NSF officer based in Nablus whom the GOI believed to be involved in the incident. In response, PA security forces arrested the officer, along with three residents of the Jordan Valley village of Talouza who were suspected of destroying evidence (specifically, of setting fire to a stolen Volkswagen Golf believed to have been used in the attack on Rabbi Hai).

Note: The detained NSF officer, who is not amongst those NSF members who have received USG-funded training, remains in PA Military Intelligence (MI) custody. End Note.

PA EXPECTATION OF COORDINATED ACTION

¶4. (C) As of December 25, according to Preventive Security Organization (PSO) Head Majid Faraj, the PA "did not expect the Israelis to act unilaterally" in investigating the crime, given that the PA and GOI "were extensively coordinating and collecting all forms of intelligence to reach those who shot the settler." According to Faraj, the PA passed the GOI detailed information about the results of their interrogation of the NSF officer detained at the request of the GOI, as well as evidence collected from interviews with the three villagers suspected of destroying evidence. According to PA Minister of the Interior Said Abu Ali, "it, despite this, became evident on Friday afternoon (December 25)" that the IDF "were less interested in receiving information, and were acting on their own, as they continued with their own

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operations in the (Nablus) area without passing intelligence" to the PA.

DECEMBER 26 IDF RAID UNEXPECTED

¶5. (C) NSF West Bank Commander al-Fatah told Post that in the early hours of December 26, an IDF undercover unit driving a van with Palestinian license plates entered Nablus city center, followed at approximately 2 o'clock a.m. by a large uniformed IDF contingent in 40-50 jeeps and other military vehicles. Note: Several Israeli media sources reported that the Israeli "Duvdevan" special forces unit were involved in the raid; the IDF press statement cited below in para 7 attributes at least part of the operation to Israeli special forces. The arrival of a larger uniformed contingent around 2:00 a.m. was widely witnessed and reported. End Note. According to al-Fatah and other PA officials, PA security services received no advance warning of the raid, and were not contacted by GOI officials until the IDF uniformed contingent was nearing downtown Nablus, after shots had been fired in the city center. End Note.

THREE SUSPECTS KILLED BY IDF IN NABLUS

¶6. (C) According to PA officials and official IDF press statements, in the course of the raid IDF conducted military operations at three sites in the center of Nablus, in the Ras al-Ein and Old City neighborhoods. Note: Nablus city center is categorized as "Area A" territory, in which the Oslo Accords assigned the PA full civil and security control. End Note. Three Palestinians were killed in the course of the IDF operations (one at each of the three locations): Raed Surkaji (age 39), Ghassan Abu Sharekh (age 38), and Anan Subih (age 33). According to PA officials and local media reports, Sukarji's wife was also injured by gunfire and later hospitalized. PA security officials tell Post that IDF troops continued to conduct military operations and patrols in downtown Nablus for approximately six-and-a-half hours, departing the city after daybreak, at around half-past-eight in the morning of December 26.

IDF STATEMENT CONFIRMS DEATH OF SUSPECTS

¶ 7. (SBU) An IDF press statement issued on December 26 titled "Terrorists Responsible for Murder Killed Overnight in Joint IDF-ISA (Israel Security Agency) Operation" noted that "overnight, security forces entered Nablus in an attempt to locate and arrest the men suspected of involvement in the murder of Meir Avshalom Hai this past Thursday." The statement concluded that, "during the operation, IDF special forces killed three terrorists responsible for carrying out the shooting." The press release stated that one of the three suspects killed, Anan Subih (spelled Tzubach in the official English version of the IDF statement) "was armed with a handgun and hiding two M16 assault rifles, an additional handgun, and ammunition." No mention was made in the IDF statement of whether the other two suspects killed were armed at the time of their death.

SUSPECTS ASSOCIATED WITH AL-AQSA MARTYRS' BRIGADES

¶ 8. (C) According to local media reports, the three deceased were affiliated with the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (AAMB), which Israeli press widely described as the "military wing of Fatah." Background: Former members of the AAMB, a largely defunct organization whose activities peaked during the Second Intifada, have been eligible since 2007 for an amnesty program jointly administered by the GOI and PA which exempts AAMB members who surrender arms and forsake violence from prosecution. The program, which has processed approximately 900 AAMB veterans to date, has been historically considered a success by the GOI and PA (Reftel). End Background. Shortly after the shooting of Rabbi Hai on December 24, local press reported that an organization called the "Imad Mughniyeh" group had claimed, via e-mail, to be responsible for the shooting -- and to be affiliated with the AAMB. PA security officials tell Post they are unable to confirm the validity of either claim.

¶ 9. (C) PA officials have confirmed that Subih was enrolled in the AAMB amnesty program, and that Sukarji -- also believed to have been associated with the AAMB -- was released from an Israeli prison in January 2009. Sharekh has been identified by local media as the brother of a prominent former Nablus-area AAMB leader, who was killed by Israeli

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Security Forces in 2004. Official IDF press statements identify all three of the deceased as members of "Fatah Tanzim," and Surkaji as a former member of the AAMB. PA security officials have also confirmed that Subih was, at the time of his death, serving as a security officer in the Preventive Security Organization (PSO). Note: A number of AAMB amnesty recipients have been integrated into the PA security services in recent years. End Note.

PA OFFICIALS BITTERLY ANGRY

¶ 10. (C) In the hours immediately following the raid, PA officials -- including Prime Minister Salam Fayyad -- were vocally and bitterly critical of the GOI decision to act unilaterally. An angry Fayyad told the Consul General on December 26 that he considered the IDF decision to act alone to "debase" the PA, given the extensive PA-GOI coordination and cooperation in the lead-up to the unexpected incursion, including the PA's provision of key investigative leads which put Israel's security services on the path to the targets. Fayyad said the IDF decision to act unilaterally inside Nablus caused serious political damage to the PA, and severely undermined support for security coordination. PCP Chief Atullah told Post that the IDF "praise Palestinian security forces at the rhetorical level, but in practice, there is no sign of increased confidence in us," a phenomenon

Atullah predicted would depress morale "not only among the rank and file, but among senior security chiefs." Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for PA President Mahmoud Abbas, told international press that "this grave Israeli escalation shows Israel is not interested in peace."

IDF RULES OF ENGAGEMENT, DOCTRINE CRITICIZED

¶11. (C) PA officials also strongly criticized IDF rules-of-engagement, which -- PA officials and the family members of the deceased allege -- led inevitably to the death (vice capture) of the three suspects. Israeli NGO B'Tselem and Palestinian human rights groups echoed the PA's accusation that at least two of the three killed were unarmed at the time of their death, and terming the IDF actions "extra-judicial actions" and "execution-style killings." Nablus Governor Jibreel al-Bakri described the raid as "a crime in cold blood." Fayyad also told the Consul General that information from the field indicated that the IDF had employed random, non-targeted fire in the city center, which was perceived by the PA as "showboating."

¶12. (C) Fayyad reacted strongly to the statement of an IDF Central Command spokesman who was quoted in the Israeli media as saying, "the PA operated well... ultimately, though, we decided to carry out the arrest operation, since it is our job to provide security for Israelis, and these three terrorists killed an Israeli." Fayyad said that the statement revealed what he believes is a very problematic aspect of IDF doctrine, arguing that PA-GOI security coordination was ultimately meaningless if the IDF perceived all crimes committed inside the West Bank involving Israeli citizens as outside the PA's remit.

PUBLIC ANGER VISIBLE AT FUNERAL RALLY

¶13. (C) Palestinian public anger about the raid and its outcome appears to exceed even official PA reaction. On the afternoon of December 26, Fayyad and senior security officials traveled to Nablus to attend the funerals of the three deceased. Fayyad and PA officials were verbally attacked by a crowd of approximately 15,000 mourners and protesters, which chanted at him "Salam is a pig, and deserves to be beaten by chains." The crowd demanded an end to PA-GOI security coordination, and revenge for the killing of the three suspects. At the wake, approximately 20 former AAMB members who had previously received GOI amnesty confronted Fayyad, demanding his assurance that they would not be targeted and killed by the GOI. Note: Post contacts report widespread fear amongst AAMB amnesty recipients that the December 26 raid represents a general revocation of their deal with the GOI. End Note.

PA-GOI SECURITY COORDINATION DEALT A "SERIOUS BLOW"

¶14. (C) PCP Chief Atullah assessed the level of public rage as "alarming," noting he had deployed more than 1,000 policemen to Nablus -- many of them in civilian clothes -- to maintain public order during the funeral. Note: According

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to Atullah the PA security operation was successful, and the December 26 gathering passed without violent incident. End note. Atullah and other PA officials noted that in a December 26 emergency meeting attended by President Abbas, Fayyad, and PA security chiefs, security officials told Abbas and Fayyad that IDF actions "systematically undermined their efforts and their image in the face of the Palestinian public," and that the IDF raid in Nablus had dealt "a serious blow to the concept of security coordination between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli security services."

RUBINSTEIN